

Why financial capitalism is no more "fictitious" than any other kind

Platypus Historians Group

Following Marx, Lukács, through his concept of "refutation," sought to deepen the critical recognition of the social-historical problem of capital, to recognize that modern society is structured and dominated by capital exhibits specific symptoms of this domination. Such symptoms are the attempts by human beings individual and collectively to master, control and adjudicate the effects of the social dynamism that capital sets in motion. However, in Marx's phrase (from the 1848 *Manifesto of the Communist Party*), the dynamic of capital ensures that "all that is solid melts into air." The modern society of capital is one in which all concrete ways of life, social organization through a cycle of "creative destruction," but Marx did not simply bemoan this dynamism of capital that ends on making transient all human endeavors, mocking their fatality.

Rather, Marx recognized this dynamism as an "alienated" form of social freedom. This creative destruction of capital is the way capital reproduces its social logic, but it also gives rise to transformations more profound than Lukács' reductionist theory could account for. The 50S aims to change a society which depends upon multiple and reciprocal systems of oppression and domination for its survival: racism and white supremacy, heterosexism and imperialism, among others. These systems, with a single exception, are simple forms of domination. A ruling stratum (whites, men) oppresses a whole some have called "ruling capitalism from itself" as when some have called "ruling capitalism from the outside." But such attempts to master the dynamics of capital will not only fail to achieve their aims, but will also entail unanticipated further consequences and problems no individual understands the characteristic form of capital to overcome it?

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1. **What is Capitalism, and how can it be overcome?** The 50S aims to change a society which depends upon multiple and reciprocal systems of oppression and domination for its survival: racism and white supremacy, heterosexism and imperialism, among others. These systems, with a single exception, are simple forms of domination. A ruling stratum (whites, men) oppresses a whole some have called "ruling capitalism from itself" as when some have called "ruling capitalism from the outside." But such attempts to master the dynamics of capital will not only fail to achieve their aims, but will also entail unanticipated further consequences and problems no individual understands the characteristic form of capital to overcome it?

2. **50S is against imperialism; what is it for?** Many anti-imperialists insist that ending American global domination would open the opportunity for revolution-ary forces across the world. But such an argument does not specify the possible agents of social transformation. With the passing of the 60s moment, whatever (slim) possibility of international revolutionary change there was has evaporated. No organized political force offers the possibility of a qualitatively better future for all humanity. How might we understand the loss of political possibility? What would make international revolutionary change possible again? What role might 50S, as a movement in the U.S., at the heart of global capitalism, play in such a process?

3. **How does racism matter?** The Civil Rights movement eliminated *de jure* discrimination, and rendered public bigotry unacceptable. But racial inequalities still exist. African Americans have, for instance, a disproportionately high rate of incarceration. Racists are not simply bigoted; they are also economically motivated. The position of sectors within the 50S -- queering, lesbian, trans, and gender-nonconforming -- is in fact, racist, what is the specific form of this racism? How does this racism relate to the broader social structure of the United States? What political and social changes would radical racism, and the very concepts of race that it depends upon, irrelevant?

4. **What kind of questions can students ask?** Members of 50S often discuss their distinctive identity as students, feeling it an unexamined and embarrassing privilege. But student the presents unique opportunities for action. The Port Huron statement sought to "replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and creativity..." The first 50S failed to meet its own task. Possession, privilege and circumstance still determine the new one succeed? The problem is broader, though. Social power: so why did the Old 50S fail? And how can we organize rallies gave way to irrational violence, the inadequacy of five years of failed Anti-War activism and Left opposition came into sharp relief.

5. **Why, and how, could the new 50S succeed where the old did not?** The Port Huron statement sought to "replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and creativity..." The first 50S failed to meet its own task. Possession, privilege and circumstance still determine the new one succeed? The problem is broader, though. Social power: so why did the Old 50S fail? And how can we organize rallies gave way to irrational violence, the inadequacy of five years of failed Anti-War activism and Left opposition came into sharp relief.

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7. **Violence at the RNC** The unraveling of the U.N. sanctions regime prior to the 2003 invasion and occupation, enforced not only by the U.S. and Britain but by neighboring states and others, cannot be separated from the history of the disintegration of the Iraqi state. The armchair quarterbacking of "anti-war" politics was from the outset [and remains to this day] tacitly, shame-facedly, in favor of the *status quo* [and worse, today, must retrospectively try to distort and apologize for what was finally, mercifully, closing.

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The Platypus Review

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the "Left" have become so inclusive as to be meaningless. The Review seeks to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches to these categories of thought and action—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke productive disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past might be elevated to an ongoing critique that seeks to clarify its object.

The editorial board wishes to provide an ongoing public forum wherein questioning and reconsidering one's own convictions is not seen as a weakness, but as part of the necessary work of building a revolutionary politics. We hope to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying the variety of positions and orientations currently represented on the political Left, in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that do not find a place within existing Left discourses, locally or internationally. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

The Platypus Review
Taking stock of the multifaceted universe of positions and goals that constitute Left politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that perhaps a deeper commonality underlies this apparent variety: what exists today is built on the desiccated remains of what was once felt to be possible.
In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left, and to evaluate their saliency for an emancipatory politics of the present. Doing this work implies a reconsideration of what we mean by "the Left".
This task necessarily begins from what we see as a prevalent feature of the Left today: a general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.
The editorial board of The Platypus Review is motivated by a sense that the very concepts of the "political" and

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Articles can range in length from 500–1,000 words. We will consider longer pieces but prefer that they be submitted as proposals.
Please send articles, event calendar listing submissions, and any inquiries about this project to:
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ment of Iraq to a "definite timetable" for withdrawal of U.S. combat troops, as the Sunni insurgency has been quelled or co-opted into the political process and Shia militias like Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Brigade have not only laid down their arms but are presently disbanding entirely. No less than Bush and McCain, Obama, too, is getting what he wants in Iraq. Everyone can declare "victory." And they are doing so. [Obama can claim vindication the degree to which the pacification of Iraq seems more due to the political process there—such as the "Anbar awakening" movement, etc.—than to U.S. military intervention.]
All the doomsday scenarios are blowing away like so many mirages in the sand, revealing that the only differences that ever existed among Republicans and Democrats amounted to posturing over matters of detail in policy implementation and not over fundamental "principles." This despite the Obama campaign's sophistic qualifiers on the evident victory of U.S. policy in Iraq being merely a "tactical success within a strategic blunder," and their pointing out that the greater goals of effective "political reconciliation" among Iraqi factions remain yet to be achieved. What was once regarded in the cynically hyperbolic "anti-war" rhetoric of the Democrats as an unmitigated "disaster" in Iraq is turning out to be something that merely could have been *done better*.

The "Left" has echoed the hollowness of such rhetoric. At base, this has been the result of a severely mistaken if not entirely delusional imagination of the war and its causes.
At base, the U.S. did not invade and occupy Iraq to steal its oil, or for any other venal or nefarious reason, but rather because the U.N.'s 12-year-old sanctions against Saddam Hussein's Baathist government, which meant the compromise and undermining of effective Iraqi sovereignty (for instance in the carving of an autonomous Kurdish zone under U.N. and NATO military protection) was unraveling in the oil-for-food scandal etc., and Saddam, after the first grave mistake of invading Kuwait, made the further fateful errors of spiting the U.N. arms inspectors and counting on being able to balance the interests of the European and other powers in the U.N. against the U.S. threat of invasion and occupation. The errors of judgment and bad-faith opportunism of Saddam, the Europeans, and others were as much the cause for the war as any policy ambitions of the neons in the Bush administration. Iraq was becoming a "failed state," and not least because of the actions of its indisputably horrifically oppressive rulers. If Saddam could not help but to choose among such bad alternatives for Iraq, this stands as indictment of the Baathist regime, its unviuable character in a changing world. The niche carved out by the combination of Cold War geopolitics and the international exploitation of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s for the Baathist shop of horrors was finally, mercifully, closing.
The unraveling of the U.N. sanctions regime prior to the 2003 invasion and occupation, enforced not only by the U.S. and Britain but by neighboring states and others, cannot be separated from the history of the disintegration of the Iraqi state. The armchair quarterbacking of "anti-war" politics was from the outset [and remains to this day] tacitly, shame-facedly, in favor of the *status quo* [and worse, today, must retrospectively try to distort and apologize for what was finally, mercifully, closing.

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In recognizing that the "liberals' criticism of Bush's foreign policy [doesn't] mind imperialism; they just want a more efficiently and rationally managed one," Reed and others' arguments on the "Left" beg the question of U.S. "imperialism" and its place in the world. This is an unexamined inheritance from the Vietnam anti-war movement of the 1960s-70s that has become *doxa* on the "Left." Put another way, it has been long since anyone questioned the meaning of "anti-imperialism"—asked, "as opposed to *what*?"
If, as Reed put it about Gore, Kerry, et al., that the "Right would have been able to hound" them into Iraq or other wars, this begs the question of why those on the "Left" would not regard Obama, Kerry, Gore, or (either) Clinton, not as *beholden* to the Right, but rather being themselves part of the *Right*, not "capitulating to" U.S. imperialism but part of its actual political foundation. There is an evident wish to avoid raising the question of what is the actual nature and character of "U.S. imperialism" and its policies, what actually makes the U.S., as Reed put it, "a scourge on the Earth," and what it means to oppose this from the "Left." For it might indeed be the case that not only the Democrats don't want such a discussion of the "foundation" of "U.S. imperialism" ("any more than the Republicans do"), but neither do those on the "Left."
For Adolph Reed, as for any ostensible "Left," the difficulty lies in the potential stakes of problematizing the role of U.S. power in the world. If the U.S. has proven to be, as Reed put it, a "scourge on the Earth," the "Left" has consistently shied away from thinking about, or remained deeply confused and self-contradictory over the reasons for this—and what can and should be done about it.
Reed placed this problem in historical context by pointing out that:

"[E]very major party presidential candidate between 1956 and 1972—except one, Barry Goldwater, who ran partly on his willingness to blow up the world and was trounced for it—ran on a pledge to end the Vietnam War. Every one of them lied, except maybe Nixon the third time he made the pledge, but that time he had a lot of help from the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong."

—But Nixon et al. would have gotten a lot more "help" living up to their pledges to end the U.S. war in Vietnam if the Communists had just laid down and died.
Was this the politics of the "big lie," as Reed insists, echoing the criticisms of the Bush administration's war policy, supposedly based on deceit, or is there a more simple and obvious explanation: that indeed, all American politicians were and remain committed to ending war, but only on their own, "U.S. imperial" terms? And why would anyone expect otherwise?
If this is the case, then, the difference between the Obama and McCain campaigns regarding U.S. "imperialism" would amount to no difference at all. Obama has pledged to remove U.S. troops from Iraq as quickly as possible, but only if the "security situation" allows this. McCain has pledged to remain in Iraq as long as it takes to "get the job done." What's the difference? Especially given that the Bush administration itself has begun troop reductions and has agreed to its negotiations with the govern-

Violence at the RNC

Ian Morrison and Benjamin Blumberg

IN MARCH 2003, millions took to the streets worldwide to protest the impending invasion of Iraq. Despite their numbers, the efforts proved in vain. The war went on; the protests dwindled. But however attenuated, there are still protests. In Minneapolis/St. Paul this August, some 10,000 marched against the Republican National Convention. But as organized rallies gave way to irrational violence, the inadequacy of five years of failed Anti-War activism and Left opposition came into sharp relief.
Most of the confrontations amounted to simple, momentary blockages of traffic. By all accounts, the police grossly overreacted: harassing journalists, brutalizing protesters, arresting the innocent. But more fringe elements in activist culture were also on display. Some hurled bricks through the window of a bus transporting delegates; others sprayed delegates with unknown irritants. These actions may seem excessive and irrational, beyond the objectives and attitudes of the wider movement. But their deeper motivations lies within the mainstream of activist culture today.
The helplessness of the anti-war movement has turned the Left's disappointments and frustrations into pathology. Energy is directed, not towards revolutionary change, but against social integration. For college-aged youth this means the transition from parental authority to working life. The anxiety and fear built up around this process of socialization creates a political imagination directed at forming ruptures and breaking points in society—everything, from organizational meetings to attending protests, centers on asserting a wall of resistance against one's own inevitable absorption into society.
As seasoned anti-war activist Alexander Cockburn pointed out last year, "an anti-war rally has to be edgy, not comfortable. Emotions should be high, nerves at least a bit raw, anger tinged with fear." ("Whatever Happened to the Anti-War Movement?" New Left Review, July-August 2007). Such emotionalism points to the way present forms of helplessness have been naturalized into one of the anti-war movement's core assumptions, turning trepidation into a political program.
Naturalizing helplessness, today's protesters celebrate simple altercations with the police as victories. Violence seems to cleanse the individual of their "bourgeois" conformity. Attending a protest means breaking with the decadence of consumer society, creating a "prefigurative" space, trying to "create the new world in the palm of the old." Each blow of the truncheon dramatizes the difference between protestor and police. The rougher the conflict, the more the protestor feels free from the burden of society.
Yet, young protesters only elicit a police beating in order to sensationalize their own submission to authority. And, ironically, this is coupled with a clear awareness that the tactics employed are utterly inadequate in addressing the issues these protests propose to be fighting. In the age of Predator Drones, blocking a highway will not stop American military might.
The Left's helplessness, on full display in Minneapolis, has eroded the very function of protest. Once, protest demonstrated the vitality and relevancy of the demand for social transformation. Thousands in the streets could not be ignored. But protest has devolved into an insular subculture of self-hatred, frustration, and anxiety derived from a pathological attitude towards social integration. Activists who equate social domination with their experience with tear gas, tazers and rubber bullets block the development of a more serious and effective Leftist politics. **IP**

The Platypus Affiliated Society presents:

What is a Movement?

A discussion on the meaning and direction of "Movements" historically and today.

Thursday, October 16, 2008, 7-9 PM

School of the Art Institute of Chicago
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Panelists:
Luis Brennan (New Students for a Democratic Society)
Chuck Hendricks (Unite Here)
Jorge Mujica (Movimiento 10 de Marzo)
Pomegranate Health Collective Representative
Richard Rubin (Platypus)

A polemic on protest Reflections on the RNC resistance

Raechel Tiffe

I DECIDED NOT TO PARTICIPATE in any illegal protests at the RNC.
There's a simple, material reason: Had I been arrested I would have been accountable for bail money (or unhappily relying on legal defense funds that I truly feel have more value elsewhere) and possibly a day's worth of income. I have been and continue to be a member of the working class. I grew up with a single mother who worked two low-paying jobs, and for the past five years, living on my own, I have survived well below the poverty line. I am also currently uninsured and without health care. Culturally speaking, the working class community might not see me so equitably; I am, after all, college educated and on my path towards the ivory tower. But still, getting arrested was not financially feasible for me. I have rent to pay.
The other reason is a little more complicated. I was afraid that I wouldn't agree with the whole agenda. I was proved right. I support: blockading the GOP buses, blocking intersections, radical dance parties in public space. I don't support: smashing windows/cars, violent hate rhetoric ("What do we want? Bush Dead!"), and, most importantly, making abstractions out of human beings.
It is not surprising or necessarily regrettable that not everyone has the same version of anarchism. And so I am not angry that there are those who choose to interpret and perform it differently, but I am angry when that performance goes so blatantly against some of the fundamental elements of this "new world in our hearts" that so many radical/anarchist/progressives claim to want. And I am angry when—even if people aren't moral pacifists—that a "movement" that claims to want the revolution can't even see the relevance in strategic pacifism. To use the most obvious and simple example: the protesters during the Civil Rights movement did not fight back, the media captured it all, and they gained the vast majority of support from our nation. I'm not trying to say that the fight against capitalism is the same as the fight against racial legislation, but I am certainly not above borrowing tactics that actually worked.
True, I was a Peace Studies minor and am chock full of stories of peaceful victories. But I am no longer a blind pacifist. Given tangible goals, sometimes destruction makes sense. The Autonomer, the original Black Bloc, protected their squats through aggressive confrontation. This is a real, concrete goal. Fighting to end "Republican" ideology is not. Breaking a Department store window will not end American conservatism.
The violence at the RNC seems to me completely goal-less. Worse, it stands in opposition to the solidarity we claim to embody. Macy's windows and those smashed up cop cars are going to be fixed by working class men and women, probably pissed that they have to spend extra time replacing what was in perfectly good condition a

This raises the issue of what "opposition" to the Iraq war policy of the Bush administration really amounts to. The Democrats' jockeying for position is an excellent frame through which to examine the politics of the war.

"Lesser evilists assert as indisputable fact that Gore, or even Kerry, wouldn't have invaded Iraq. Perhaps Gore wouldn't have, but I can't say that's a sure thing. [And who was his running mate, by the way? Joe Lieberman, who recently spoke in support of McCain at the Republican National Convention—CC.] Moreover, we don't know what other military adventurism that he—like Clinton— would have undertaken . . . No, I'm not at all convinced that the Right wouldn't have been able to hound either Gore into invading Iraq or Kerry into continuing the war indefinitely."

Now might be a good time to step back and look at assumptions regarding the politics of the war, and assess their true nature and character, what they have meant for the mainstream as well as for the ostensible "Left."
One major assumption that has persisted from the beginning of the anti-war movement and over the course of the two presidential terms of the Bush administration has been that the Iraq war was the result of a maverick policy, in which "neoconservative" ideologues hijacked the U.S. government in order to implement an extreme agenda. Recently, more astute observers of American politics such as Adolph Reed (in "Where Obamaism seems to be going," Black Agenda Report, July 16, 2008, on-line at blackagenda.org) have conceded the point that a war in Iraq could easily have been embraced even by a Democratic administration. Reed writes:

BARACK OBAMA had, until recently, made his campaign for President of the United States a referendum on the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the Democratic Party primaries, Obama attacked Hillary Clinton for her vote in favor of the invasion. Among Republican contenders, John McCain went out of his way to appear as the candidate most supportive of the Bush administration's policy in Iraq. Looking towards the general election, it is over Iraq that the candidates have been most clearly opposed: Obama has sought to distinguish himself most sharply from McCain on Iraq, emphasizing their differences in judgment. Prior to the recent financial melt-down on Wall Street, there was a consistency of emphasis on Iraq as a signal issue of the campaign. But with Iraq dramatically pacified in recent months, its political importance has diminished. Obama's position on Iraq has, if anything, lost him traction as the McCain-supported Bush policy has succeeded.

For the Democrats' criticism of the Bush policy has been transparently opportunistic, to seize upon the problems of the war for political gain against the Republicans. Opposition has come only to the extent that the war seemed to be a failed policy, something of which Obama has taken advantage because he was not in the U.S. Senate when the war authorization was voted, and so he has been able to escape culpability for this decision his fellow Democrats made when it was less opportune to oppose the war. [Recall that this fact was the occasion for Bill Clinton's infamous remark that Obama's supposed record of uncompromised opposition to the war was a "fairytale," for Clinton pointed out that Obama had admitted that he didn't know how he would have voted had he been in the Senate at the time.] Furthermore, opposition to the war on the supposed "Left" has similarly focused on the Bush administration (for example in the very name of the anti-war coalition World Can't Wait, i.e., until the next election, and their call to "Exorcise the Bush Regime"), thus playing directly into the politics of the Democratic Party, resulting now in either passive or active support of the Obama candidacy.
On Obama's candidacy, Reed went on to say that

"Obama is on record as being prepared to expand the war [on terror"] into Pakistan and maybe Iran . . . He's also made pretty clear that AIPAC [American-Israel Public Affairs Committee] has his ear, which does it for the Middle East, and I wouldn't be shocked if his administration were to continue, or even step up, underwriting covert operations against Venezuela, Cuba [he's already several times linked each of those two governments with North Korea and Iran] and maybe Ecuador or Bolivia. . . . This is where I don't give two shits for the liberals' criticism of Bush's foreign policy; they don't mind imperialism; they just want a more efficiently and rationally managed one. As Paul Street argues in *Black Agenda Report*, as well as in his forthcoming book *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, an Obama presidency would further legitimize the imperialist orientation of US foreign policy by inscribing it as liberalism or the 'new kind' of progressivism. . . . [T]he bipartisan 'support the troops' rhetoric that has become a scaffold for discussing the war is a ruse for not addressing its foundation in a bellicose, imperialist foreign policy that makes the United States a scourge on the Earth. Obama, like other Dems, doesn't want such a discussion any more than the Republicans do because they're all committed to maintaining that foundation."

Capital in history

The need for a Marxian philosophy of history of the Left

Chris Cutrone

[The following is a talk that was given at the Marxist-Humanist Committee public forum on *The Crisis in Marxist Thought*, hosted by the *Platypus Affiliated Society* in Chicago on Friday, July 25, 2008.]

I WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT the meaning of *history* for any purportedly Marxian Left.

We in Platypus focus on the history of the *Left* because we think that the narrative one tells about this history is in fact one's theory of the *present*. Implicitly or explicitly, in one's conception of the history of the Left, is an account of how the present came to be. By focusing on the history of the Left, or, by adopting a Left-centric view of history, we hypothesize that the most important determinations of the present are the result of what the Left has done or failed to do historically.

For the purposes of this talk, I will focus on the broadest possible framing for such questions and problems of capital in history, the broadest possible context within which I think one needs to understand the problems faced by the Left, specifically by a purportedly Marxian Left.

I will not, for example, be focusing so much on issues for Platypus in the history of the various phases and stages of capital itself, for instance our contention that the 1960s represented not any kind of advance, but a profound retrogression on the Left. I will not elucidate our account of how the present suffers from at least 3 generations of degeneration and regression on the Left: the first, in the 1930s, being tragic; the second in the 1960s being farcical; and the most recent, in the 1990s, being sterilizing.

But, suffice it to say, I will point out that, for Platypus, the recognition of *regression* and the attempt to understand its significance and causes is perhaps our most important point of departure. The topic of this talk is the most fundamental assumption informing our understanding of regression.

For purposes of brevity, I will not be citing explicitly, but I wish to indicate my indebtedness for the following treatment of a potential Marxian philosophy of history, beyond Marx and Engels themselves, and Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky, to Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and, last but not least, the Marx scholar Moishe Postone. And, moreover, I will be in dialogue, through these writers, with Hegel, who distinguished *philosophical* history as the story of the development of *freedom*.—For Hegel, history is only *meaningful* the degree to which it is the story of freedom.

Capital is completely unprecedented in the history of

humanity, hence, any struggle for emancipation beyond capital is also completely unprecedented. While there is a connection between the unprecedented nature of the *emergence* of capital in history and the struggle to get *beyond* it, this connection can also be highly misleading, leading to a false symmetry between the transition *into* and *within* different periods of the transformations of modern capital, and a potential transition *beyond* capital. The revolt of the Third Estate, which initiated a still on-going and never-to-be-exhausted modern history of bourgeois-democratic revolutions, is both the ground for, and, from a Marxian perspective, the now potentially historically obsolescent social form of politics from which proletarian socialist politics seeks to depart, to get beyond.

Hegel, as a philosopher of the time of the last of the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions marking the emergence of modern capital, the Great French Revolution of 1789, was for this reason a theorist of the revolt of the Third Estate. Marx, who came later, after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century, faced problems Hegel did not.

It has often been stated, but not fully comprehended by Marxists that Marx recognized the *historical* mission of the class-conscious proletariat, to overcome capitalism and to thus do away with class society. Traditionally, this meant, however paradoxically, either the end of the pre-history or the beginning of the true history of humanity—in a sense, this duality of the possibility of an *end* and a true *beginning*, was a response to a Right Hegelian notion of an end to history, what is assumed by apologists for capital as a best of all possible worlds.

Famously, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels stated that all history hitherto has been the history of class struggles; Engels added a clever footnote later that specified "all written history." We might extrapolate from this that what Engels meant was the history of civilization; history as class struggle did not pertain, for instance, to human history or social life prior to the formation of classes, the time of the supposed "primitive communism." Later, in 1942 (in "Reflections on Class Theory"), Adorno, following Benjamin (in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940), wrote that such a conception by Marx and Engels of all of history as the history of class struggles was in fact a *critique* of all of history, a critique of history itself.

So in what way does the critique of *history* matter in the critique of *capital*? The problem with the commonplace view of capitalism as primarily a problem of exploitation is that it is in this dimension that capital fails

to distinguish itself from other forms of civilization. What is new in capital is social *domination*, which must be distinguished both logically and historically, structurally and empirically, from exploitation, to which it is not reducible. Social domination means the domination of society by capital. This is what is *new* about capital in the history of civilization; prior forms of civilization knew overt domination of some social groups over others, but did not know as Marx recognized in capital a social dynamic to which all social groups—all aspects of society as a whole—are subject.

So we must first draw a demarcation approximately 10,000 years ago, with the origins of civilization and class society, when the great agricultural revolution of the Neolithic Age took place, and human beings went from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to becoming settled agriculturalists. The predominant mode of life for humanity went from the hunter-gatherer to the peasant, and was this for most of subsequent history.

Several hundred years ago, however, a similarly profound transformation began, in which the predominant mode of life has gone from agricultural peasant to urban worker: wage-earner, manufacturer, and industrial producer.

More proximately, with the Industrial Revolution in the late-18th to early-19th Centuries, certain aspects of the "bourgeois" epoch of civilization and society manifested themselves and threw this history of the emergence of modernity into a new light. Rather than an "end of history" as bourgeois thinkers up to that time had thought, modern social life entered into a severe crisis that fundamentally problematized the transition from peasant- to worker-based society.

With Marx in the 19th Century came the realization that bourgeois society, along with all its categories of subjectivity including its valorization of labor, might itself be transitional, that the end-goal of humanity might not be found in the productive individual of bourgeois theory and practice, but that this society might point beyond itself, towards a potential qualitative transformation at least as profound as that which separated the peasant way of life from the urban "proletarian" one, indeed a transition more on the order of profundity of the Neolithic Revolution in agriculture that ended hunter-gatherer society 10,000 years ago, more profound than that which separated modern from traditional society.

At the same time that this modern, bourgeois society ratcheted into high gear by the late-18th Century, it entered into crisis, and a new, unprecedented historical

phenomenon was manifested in political life, the "Left."—While earlier forms of politics certainly disputed values, this was not in terms of historical "progress," which became the hallmark of the Left.

The Industrial Revolution of the early 19th Century, the introduction of machine production, was accompanied by the optimistic and exhilarating socialist utopias suggested by these new developments, pointing to fantastical possibilities expressed in the imaginations of Fourier and Saint-Simon, among others.

Marx regarded the society of "bourgeois right" and "private property" as indeed already resting on the social constitution and mediation of labor, from which private property was derived, and asked the question of whether the trajectory of this society, from the revolt of the Third Estate and the manufacturing era in the 18th Century to the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century, indicated the possibility of a further development.

In the midst of the dramatic social transformations of the 19th Century in which as Marx put it in the Manifesto that "all that was solid melted into air," as early as 1843, Marx prognosed and faced the future virtual proletarianization of society, and asked whether and how humanity in proletarian form might liberate itself from this condition, whether and how, and with what necessity the proletariat would "transcend" and "abolish itself." As early as the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx recognized that socialism [of Proudhon et al.] was itself symptomatic of capital: proletarian labor was *constitutive* of capital, and thus its politics was *symptomatic* of how the society conditioned by capital might reveal itself as transitional, as pointing beyond itself.—This was Marx's most fundamental point of departure, that proletarianization was a substantial social problem and not merely relative to the bourgeoisie, and that the proletarianization of society was not the overcoming of capital but its fullest realization, and that this—the proletarianization of society of *capital*—pointed beyond itself.

Thus, with Marx, a philosophy of the history of the *Left* was born. For Marx was not a socialist or communist so much as a thinker who tasked himself with understanding the *meaning* of the emergence of proletarian socialism in *history*. Marx was not simply the best or most consistent or radical socialist, but rather the *most historically*, and hence critically, *self-aware*. By "scientific" socialism, Marx understood himself to be elaborating a form of knowledge aware of its own conditions of possibility.

For a Hegelian and Marxian clarification of the speci-

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sector]. Polanyi, for instance, complained that capitalism commodified three things that supposedly cannot be commodities, labor, land and money itself. In such a one-sided opposition to capital, Polanyi neglected to realize that what makes modern society what it is, what distinguishes modern capitalism from earlier pre-modern forms of capital, is that it precisely entails subjecting these supposedly not "commodifiable" things to the commodity form. Modern capital is precisely about the radical revolutionizing of how we relate to forms of social intercourse, labor, and nature.

So no one should be fooled into thinking that supposedly better forms of politically managing (e.g., under the Democrats) the social investment in, and thus preserving the "value" and promoting the improvement of material production, infrastructure, or forms of knowledge represents any kind of sure "progress."—No one should mistake for even a moment that such efforts will not be a windfall and lining the pockets of the capitalists (on "Main Street") through upward income-redistribution schemes any less than "bailing out" Wall Street will be.

The presently bemoaned deregulation of financial institutions that occurred under Bill Clinton in the 1990s was not meant [merely] to enrich the rich further, but to open the way for new forms of economic and social relations, both locally and globally. Such "neo-liberal" reforms were meant to overcome, in Milton Friedman's phrase, the "tyranny of the status quo"—a sentiment any emancipatory Left ought not to regard with excessive cynicism. For the neo-liberals found a hearing not only among the wealthy, but also among many left out of the prior Keynesian/Fordist arrangements—see, for instance, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus's social activist work in "microfinance" in Bangladesh.

A Marxian approach to the problem of capital, as Lukács warned with his concept of "reification," recognizes that "labor" and its forms of "production" are no less "refried" and "ideological" in their practices under capital, no less "unreal" and subject to de-realization, with destructive social consequences, than are the forms of "exchange," monetization and finance.

An authentically Marxian Left should take no side in the present debates over the merits and pitfalls of the "balout" of the financial system. One can and should critique this, of course, but nonetheless remain aware that this is no simple matter of opposing it. This side of revolutionary emancipation beyond capital, a Marxian politics would demand to better finance capital no less than to support labor. Finance capital is no less legitimate if also no less symptomatic of capital than any other phenomenon of modern life. So it deserves not to be vilified or denounced but understood as a way humanity has tried authentically to cope with the creative destruction of capital in modern social life. **IP**

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has played a strategy in his campaign from which any purported "Left" must learn politically: that it is not a good idea to bank ahead of time on the defeat of one's opponents. Obama's campaign is in more trouble than it might have been because it has lost its signal issue with which to prosecute the Republicans with the Bush administration, a "losing" war in Iraq. Obama can be elected despite this, and fudge the issue of the war and "opposition" to it as policy.

But the "Left" remains in a similar but in fact much worse predicament. The "Left" never asked the burning question: What if the Bush policy "succeeds"? Then what will be the basis for opposition to U.S. "imperialism"?

Iraq is nothing like Vietnam, despite the wishes of the "Left" to have history repeat itself. If Iraq does not, as it appears it will not, fall apart or drag on in endless slaughter, but continues to stabilize, and does not give up sovereignty over its oil resources, etc., but simply allows the U.S. some minimal military presence through its embassy there, and continues to work with the U.S. against groups like al-Qaeda, Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah, the Kurdish PKK guerrillas in Turkey, and willingly sides with the U.S., as it will inevitably, in any potential future wars against Iran or Syria, etc., will this mean that the U.S. invasion and occupation diminished Iraq's "sovereignty" and so was a phenomenon of U.S. "imperialism"? What will be the account of Iraqi motives in the arrangement achieved by U.S. intervention, as mere stooges for the U.S.?

And won't this mean taking a much coarser and narrower-minded view of the actual concrete politics of Iraq and the Middle East than those evinced by Obama, McCain and (even) Bush, so effectively disqualifying the "Left" as being in any way competent to comment, let alone critique or offer political alternatives?

What will remain the basis for the "Left's" opposition to U.S. policy in a world McCain or Obama would make after Bush — after Blackwater, et al. qui the Iraqi scene, as they already are doing, and not through defeat but success, and not without some selective high-profile [if become less interesting] investigations and prosecutions of "war crimes" by Americans, now that the U.S. can afford them?

How will U.S. power in the world be understood, and what critique and vision of the future will be posed in the face of its undiminished capacities? **IP**

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Reenacting '68

Liam Warfield

THE CROWD ASSEMBLED in a shady corner of Grant Park in the waning afternoon hours of August 28 might have been mistaken for extras in a poorly-funded period film. With clothes loosely evoking 60's-era protest, they reclined in the grass, rolling cigarettes, eating peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, listening to speeches and gazing at the sky. It might have seemed a stretch to bill the event as a historical reenactment of the notorious 1968 Democratic National Convention protests — that long and bloody week in Chicago which has been discussed and picked over at length in this 40th anniversary year. The emblems of Chicago '68 — wild-eyed police officers with nightsticks — were nowhere to be seen. Grant Park on that afternoon was more concerned with the action around the campfire than the savagery on the battlefield.

It might seem purely semantic that we insisted on considering the event a *historical reenactment* rather than a commemoration or a bit of theater, but for us this was an important distinction. As a group of young, largely inexperienced activists it was the only organizing framework we could find which emphasized *active* participation. Other forms seemed linguistically and ideologically flaccid; of course we could observe the anniversary, as people had been doing all summer, but this implied an insufficient (and appalling) detachment from the subject. We didn't want to view our history—*our radical history*—as if from a riverbank, we wanted to jump in and splash around in it.

The reenactment of the 1968 Chicago DNC protests would be a curious project, difficult to pull, the shape of it abnormal and constantly shifting. Our purpose seemed perfectly obvious at times, entirely digestible—a *historical reenactment* of the '68 DNC protests, that's all—but at other times it seemed to bulge surrealistically in a thousand directions. Would we aim for some degree of historical accuracy, or would anything fly? We debated, for instance, the ethics of nominating a live pig for the presidency: what should we feed it, and where would it stay? Which would we feed the masses of reenactors, potato or pasta salad? And in the event of trouble with the police, what, among a stunning array of possible tactics, might prove our wisest course of action? We plotted and planned over the summer to the point of exhaustion; the minutiae multiplied endlessly. And yet, when pressed as to why we were attempting such a thing, we had no ready answer. It was soundbite-resistant, experimental, it called for deep breaths and meandering explanations.

Clearly this history had not yet been codified. It continued to elicit a variety of interpretations. A recent addition to the collection of books on '68, Frank Kusch's *Battleground Chicago*, attempted a cop's-eye view of the week's event; academics and historians continued to tackle the subject from disparate angles, trying to come to grips with this jarring moment in modern American history when power and resistance grappled so publicly and with so much violence and fanfare. Our subject matter still was squirming, making it impossible to predict what shape a reenactment might



take. We estimated an attendance of anywhere from 100 to 10,000 people—who could say how many Chicagoans knew or cared enough about the '68 convention to devote a day in the park to its exploration?—and we applied rather blindly for a permit from the Park District, treading lightly through their downtown office as if in an enemy lair; we contemplated a range of possible police responses, from utter indifference to full-scale riot. We solicited the advice of everyone from '60s-era activist-professors like Abe Peck and Bernadine Dohrn to freemasons like Ed Sanders, though few of these aging lions had much to offer beyond bemused encouragement.

What few of us predicted, in the midst of our fretting, was the cool and contemplative afternoon which ultimately unfolded. A small detail of bike police, having preemptively barricaded the iconic Logan statue from a possible storming, relaxed on the far periphery as local authors, filmmakers, activists and historians chewed over the meaning of the '68 convention's legacy, and performers exhumed the ghosts of the DNC's radical celebrity class, from Phil Ochs and the MC5 to Bobby Seale and Allen Ginsberg. I found myself delivering a surprisingly mild-tempered speech which called for the metaphorical sharing of blankets. Occasional pot fumes wafted across the crowd, no mere prop, and by twilight, after several hours of speech-making and folksinging, the ritual of mass meditation seemed almost capable of releasing us from the weight of this history. This release was something of an illusion, of course. The following week, protesters at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul were being tear-gassed and arrested by the hundreds, their homes and gathering places raided by teams from the Department of Homeland Security. The historic echoes were inevitable and maddening, the old

stalemate so clearly still at work. It was difficult to reconcile what we'd accomplished — little more or less than a beautiful and thought-provoking afternoon in the park — with the ugly echoes of '68 emanating from the Twin Cities. If our reenactment, unpermitted and inherently anti-authoritarian, was a modest exercise in discovering what we could get away with in the public sphere, news from St. Paul came as a stern reminder of what we *couldn't* get away with. A shady corner of Grant Park on a late-summer evening, they'd give us that, but to agitate outside of an actual political convention, with all of those television cameras on hand, would prove as unfeasible in 2008 as it was 40 years ago. Protesters in St. Paul were being summarily tear-gassed and jailed en masse, held (unconstitutionally) for the duration of the convention week to preclude further disruption. It was sobering to speculate that law enforcement might have learned more about stifling dissent, over the last 40 years, than demonstrators had learned about cultivating it.

We were asked several times, in the course of planning the event, whether it might lead to similar historical reenactments in the future. It was an understandable question to be asked by journalists, but it misses the point. The last thing we wanted, though we had a curious way of showing it, was to lose ourselves in yesterday's near-revolutionary moments, to fetishize or serialize them for their own sake. We were more interested in comprehending their shortcomings; the fact that the '68 convention was followed shortly by the election of Richard Nixon and a marked increase in political repression served as a prominent footnote to our idyl in the park. The clear view of history which we were striving for would not illuminate, of its own accord, any paths forward. It might, we hoped, foster meaningful dialogue. **IP**

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the history of Baathism]. In comparison with such evasion of responsibility, the Bush administration's invasion and occupation of Iraq was an eminently *responsible* act. They were willing to stake themselves in a way the Democrats and the Europeans and others were not—and the "Left" *could not*. The "success" of the Bush policy amounts to its ability to cast all alternatives into more or less impotent posturing. Attributing motives for the war to American profiteering is to mistake effect for cause. Complaining about the fact that American companies have profited from the war is to impotently protest against the world as it is, for *someone* was going to profit from it—would it be better if French, Japanese or Saudi firms did so?

That the U.S. government under Bush broke decorum and made the gesture of invading Iraq "unilaterally" without U.N. Security Council approval says nothing to the fact that Iraq was likely to be invaded and occupied [by "armed inspection teams" supported by tens of thousands of "international" troops, etc.] in any case. Did it really matter whether the U.S. had the U.N. fig leaf covering the ugliness of its military instrument? It was only a matter of when and how it was to be put to use, in managing the international problem the Iraqi state had become. No one among the international powers—that-be, including the most "rogue" elements of the global order [Russia, China, Iran, et al.] had any firm interest in restoring to Saddam's Baathists the *status quo* from before 1990 and, needless to say, not only the U.S. and Britain, but also

Saudi Arabia and Iran, and most especially the Iraqi Kurds and Shia, were not about to let that happen. Saddam was on the way out. It was only a matter of *how*.

All the rhetoric about the "overreach" and "hubris" of U.S. policy in Iraq says nothing to the fact that a cross-roads there was being reached—this was already true under Clinton. All the bombast about the "illegal"—or even "criminal"—character of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq neglects the simple fact that the U.S. occupation was authorized by the U.N. When Democrats impugn the "crusading" motives of the Bush administration with sophistry about the supposed folly of trying to spread "democracy" in Iraq and the greater Middle East, is this a "progressive" argument, or a *conservative* one?

Not only the Democrats' but the "Left's" opposition to the Iraq war has in fact been from the *Right*. This is revealed most perversely by the history of the Iraq policy recommendations of Joe Biden, who has been touted by the Obama campaign as bringing "foreign policy credentials" to their ticket as candidate for Vice President. Biden once advocated a break-up of Iraq into separate Shia, Sunni and Kurdish states, during the height of the Sunni insurgency, which would have punished the Sunni by leaving them without access to Iraq's oil wealth [which is concentrated in the Kurdish and Shiite areas of Kirkuk and Basra]. Would pursuit of such an ethno-sectarian division of Iraq have been a "progressive" outcome for furthering the "democratic self-determination" of the peoples of Iraq?—In comparison with the 2006 troop "surge" that has in fact, as even Obama has put it, "succeeded beyond our wildest dreams." Or might we see in such apparently "extreme" policy alternatives as Biden's a deeper underlying fact, that from the standpoint of not only U.S. "imperial" interests but those of the global order, it doesn't make much difference if Iraq remains a single or is broken up into multiple states, whether it is ruled by secular or theocratic regimes, or whether its government is "democratic" or dictatorial, whether its civil society is "liberal" or not. But, presumably, this matters a great deal to the Iraqis!

None of the posed alternatives regarding Iraq—not before, during or since the invasion and occupation—can be ascribed to being inherently in service of or opposed to the on-going realities of U.S. power ("imperialism"), or the interests of global capitalism, because all of them are compatible with these. Rather, the policy alternatives are all matters of opportunistic orientation to an underlying reality that is not being substantially challenged or even recognized politically by any of the actors involved, great or small, on the "Right" or "Left." from al-Qaeda to the neoconservatives, or "libertarians" like Ron Paul, from Bush to the President of the Iranian Islamic Republic Ahmadinejad, and Republicans and Democrats from McCain to Obama, or "independents" and the Green Party's candidates Cynthia McKinney and Ralph Nader, to the far-Left of "anarchists" and other Antonians like writers for *Counterpunch* and the Chomskys, et al. at *Z* magazine, or the "anti-war" protest coalitions led by "Marxist" groups

such as the International Socialist Organization [United for Peace and Justice coalition, Campus Anti-war Network], Workers World Party [ANSWER coalition], or the Revolutionary Communist Party [World Can't Wait coalition].

All of the supposed "anti-imperialists"—from Iraq policy dissident Republicans like Senator Chuck Hagel, to the most intransigent "Marxists" like the Spartacist League—have failed to be truly anti-"imperialist" in their approach to Iraq, nor could they be, for none could have possibly challenged the fundamental conditions of U.S. power in global capital. There is no politics of anti-imperialism, for no one asks politically whether and what it means to say that the U.S. could be more or less "imperialist," whether the world order can do without the U.S. acting as global cop—asking, who, for instance, would play this nevertheless necessary role in the *absence* of the U.S.? For there is no one. And no purported "Left" should want "openings" for their own sake in the global order—as if any "cracks" in the "system" won't be the holes into which the world's most abject will be immediately swallowed, without in any way sparing the next batch of victims in the train-wreck of history.

The fundamental inability of *anyone* on the "Left" to take a meaningfully alternative position on Iraq, beyond hoping (vainly) for the "defeat" of or "resistance" to U.S. policy, and thus immediately joining the opportunism of the politics of the Democrats, dissident Republicans, and European and other statesmen, should serve as a warning about the dire political state of the world and its possibilities today. Accusations might fly about who may more or less tacitly "support" "U.S. imperialism," but there is such a thing as protesting too much, especially when it must be admitted that *nothing can be done* right now to alter the given global political and social realities in a progressive-emancipatory manner. If, as Adolph Reed put it, the U.S. remains a "scourge on the Earth," is the alternative only to impotently *denounce* this and not try to properly *understand* it—and understand what it would mean to prepare to begin to meaningfully *challenge* and *overcome* this?

As appalling as it might be to recognize, McCain in his Republican National Convention speech was actually more truthful and straightforward than Obama when he pointed out that he has stood consistently behind what has proved to be a successful policy in Iraq. Obama now must dissemble on the issue.

On the other hand, the essence of Obama's candidacy can be seen in the figure of Samantha Power, who was sacked from his primary campaign after saying, correctly, that Hillary Clinton was a "monster" who would "say anything" to get elected. Power is a liberal promoter of "human rights" military interventionism, and began working as a senior advisor for Obama immediately after he was elected to the U.S. Senate. Power is a representative of Obama's version of the historical precedent of JFK's team of "the best and the brightest" such as Robert McNamara. In fact, Obama's candidacy has been in its origins much more about "foreign" than "domestic" policy, and more

than will be apparent now that Iraq has been neutralized as the main issue in the election. Obama, no less than McCain, is campaigning for the office not only of the "top cop" of the U.S., but of the world. Obama's campaign is over effective policy for this role, not the role itself.

The "Left" is now up in arms in the face of Obama's candidacy because his campaign explicitly aims to refurbish the U.S. government's capacity to play this role, and perhaps even in expanded ways, as U.S. power would be equipped to advance the liberal cause of "human rights" internationally more idealistically and less cynically than under Bush or Clinton.

But this raises the issue of how to understand the U.S.'s role in the world. Only at its peril does the Left treat the explicit Wilsonian doctrine that has essentially underwritten U.S. policy and power after the First World War as hypocritical or cynical, for the project of the U.S. as the central, without-peer hegemonic power of global capital is one in which all states internationally participate (through the U.N., the international treaty organization of U.S. power), only to a greater or lesser extent. Maintaining the "peaceful" conditions of capital has and will continue to prove a bloody business at global scale. As much as one might wish otherwise or simply regret the onus of U.S. power, reality must be faced.

The hyperbole around Iraq in mainstream politics is best illustrated by that favored word, "quagmire." But behind this has been hysteria, not reason. Feeling in one's step the pull of some gum on the pavement is not the threat of sinking into quicksand! The Iraqi "insurgents" knew better than their apologists and cynical anti-Bush well-wishers among the Democrats and European and other powers—and their open cheerleaders on the "Left"—that they were not so intransigent, not so willing to die to a last man in their "opposition" to the U.S. and its policies, but only wished to drive a harder bargain at the negotiating table with the U.S. and its allies in Iraq—and now they are themselves becoming allies of the Iraqi government and the U.S.

Currently, it might still remain unclear whether the combined actions and apparent attenuation of the Iraqi insurgents/militias and the struggle among the ruling and oppositional parties of the Iraqi government and, behind them, their foreign backers in Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the apparent disarray of the regime of the Iranian Islamic Republic in its nuclear standoff with the U.S. and European powers, amount to a temporary situation borne of a shared wish to ride the Obama train (or merely the potential for change inherent in the election cycle) into a better bargaining position regarding U.S. policy and so not to spoil the U.S. election and bring the supposedly more bellicose John McCain to power through the fear of the American public, or whether they've given up the bloody game of jockeying for influence in Iraq because they've already spent what chips they had in the last 5 years.

In any case, as far as the election is concerned, Obama